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PROGRAMME DEVELOPMENT IN THE AMERICAS AND CARIBBEAN REGION

The present document highlights and analyses the main events and new trends in the Americas and Caribbean region that have affected UNICEF programme cooperation during 1990.

The UNICEF regional office for the Americas and Caribbean has responsibility for cooperation in the following countries and territories: Anguilla, Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Barbados, Belize, Bolivia, Brazil, British Virgin Islands, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Grenada, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Montserrat, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, Turks and Caicos Islands, Uruguay and Venezuela.

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I. POLITICAL AND SOCIAL CONTEXT

A. Achievements and challenges

1. Despite the region's long-standing and emerging structural difficulties, strides were made in almost every country towards establishing and consolidating democratic Governments, with the elections in Nicaragua and Haiti in 1990 being recent examples of this trend.

2. The region's chronic poverty and growing unrest, however, pose threats to the process of democratization in the long term. New Governments are assuming power at a time when the significant reductions in resources for social development plans and programmes undermine their ability to meet the development challenges they face. In addition, the growing level of open violence, particularly in Colombia, El Salvador, Guatemala and Peru, is a further challenge to the region. The survival of both new and established Governments is made precarious when conflicting factions, social groups and Governments themselves, inflamed by external interventions, resort to violence rather than dialogue to solve problems.

3. Despite the many constraints, political will and commitment to the needs of children have remained very high this past year, bolstered by intense and varied advocacy actions at the country level on two global initiatives: the Convention on the Rights of the Child, already ratified by 16 countries in the region; and the World Summit for Children. The region's representation at the Summit was notable: 25 per cent of all Heads of State or Government attending the Summit were from the region, an area with only approximately 10 per cent of the world's population. Post-Summit actions by Governments have also been encouraging. Although the heads of State of Bolivia, Cuba and Ecuador did not attend the Summit, they subsequently endorsed and signed the World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children and the Plan of Action. Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico, Peru, Uruguay and Venezuela, reaffirming their support for the World Declaration, indicated their readiness to commit the resources necessary to guarantee child development at a meeting in Caracas in October 1990.

B. Emerging trends

4. Taking advantage of the process of democratization in the region, UNICEF offices have increased their advocacy efforts on behalf of children and women among parliamentarians and some national institutions in the region. Some successes have been achieved in this regard, and the experience gained should be valuable in the future.

5. Decentralization, a development that has arisen partly in response to democratization and partly owing to the decline in resources available for public spending, is creating new opportunities for the participation and mobilization of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the private sector at the grass-roots level, usually collectively referred to in the region as

sociedad civil. The challenge now for Governments is to sustain the participation and mobilization of such groups by ensuring that they are included in social planning and in the formulation of legislation.

6. The Americas and the Caribbean Regional Office organized a meeting of all country representatives and senior headquarters staff in Portillo, Chile, early in 1990 to formulate specific strategies for achieving UNICEF corporate goals in the region. The resulting Portillo document, together with the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Summit Declaration, express the guiding focus of UNICEF operations, goals and commitments in the region. In this regard, the Governments of Colombia, Mexico and Venezuela have already initiated actions to implement the goals and monitor the progress achieved. Concomitantly, the ministers of health and education of all Central American countries, responding to the dynamics set in motion, particularly at the World Conference on Education for All held at Jomtien, Thailand, in 1990, met in Punta Arenas, Costa Rica, to work towards the same ends. In brief, the region is passing from the stage of declaration to action in its attempts to comply with the goals of the year 2000.

7. An important response to initiatives already undertaken by Governments in the region will be UNICEF support for monitoring activities, including the identification of social indicators, the formulation of appropriate methodologies for monitoring and evaluation and the dissemination of results. In this regard, the Americas and the Caribbean Regional Office has already included activities on education, nutrition and monitoring and evaluation in the regional work plan for 1991 and in scheduled staff development workshops. Similarly, UNICEF will seek to include a monitoring component in the maternal and child health (MCH) plans of action that will be prepared by all countries of the region in collaboration with the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA).

II. ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL MATTERS

8. Economic conditions in the region remain bleak. The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) estimated a cumulative decrease equivalent to 9.6 per cent of the gross national product (GNP) per capita during the years 1981-1990. This decline occurred during conditions of high inflation, a net transfer of resources to industrialized countries and adjustment measures that significantly reduced fiscal resources. The external debt of the countries of the region totals $423 billion and, for the ninth consecutive year, the region was a net exporter of capital - $18.9 billion in 1990 alone. The result of those developments has been an average cumulative reduction in consumption equivalent to 13 per cent, with purchasing capacity among the poorest groups falling to an even more critical level.

9. As a result, social sector budgets have shrunk alarmingly in some countries. For example, the Minister of Planning in Peru indicated that some 75 per cent of resources that would otherwise be allocated to social sector

needs have been shifted to cover debt-related measures and counter-violence activities.

10. In response to the social and economic crises they face, some countries have created "social investment funds", with the objective of alleviating the adverse effects of structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) and deteriorating economic conditions on the most vulnerable sections of their populations.

11. However, economic and social vulnerability continues to be the condition of millions of people in the region, with chronic poverty affecting some 270 million people (62 per cent of the region's population). The situation is not expected to improve during the 1990s despite the fact that GNP is anticipated to increase moderately. The World Bank World Development Report 1990 projected that the GNP growth rate in developing countries as a whole could increase to 5.1 per cent. In Latin American countries, however, the growth rate is projected to reach only 2.3 per cent. It should be noted that these projections were made before the crisis resulting from the situations between Iraq and Kuwait.

III. HIGHLIGHTS OF PROGRAMME, EXTERNAL RELATIONS AND MANAGEMENT ISSUES

A. Child survival

12. If no substantive deterioration in current social and political conditions occurs, the goal of universal child immunization (UCI) is expected to be achieved by the end of 1991 in 19 countries. A further 10 countries will have to make special efforts to achieve the goal and 5 countries will not achieve it. However, the region is on the verge of reaching the goal of polio eradication: during 1990, only 10 cases of wild polio virus were confirmed. In reaching this stage, a key role was played at regional and country levels by the Inter-agency Coordinating Committee, whose members include PAHO/World Health Organization (WHO), the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Rotary International and UNICEF. The success of the approach has prompted a similar effort in the control of diarrhoeal diseases. The formulation of phase II of the expanded programme on immunization (EPI) (1991-1995) is a new challenge facing both the countries of the region and UNICEF, in which success will be measured by decreases in the rates of vaccine-preventable diseases rather than by the percentages of children immunized. An evolution of child survival and development (CSD) initiatives towards more comprehensive MCH/primary health care programmes (PHC) has also been observed in the region.

B. Child development and basic education

13. In preparation for the World Conference on Education for All, the countries of the region met at Quito, in November 1989, where they emphasized the need for early childhood development to occupy an important place in all

basic education strategies. This emphasis was reaffirmed by the Americas and the Caribbean Regional Office during a meeting held in Portillo, Chile, in early 1990, in which it was adopted as part of the UNICEF strategy for comprehensive child development in the region. Bearing in mind the importance of early childhood development, UNICEF will increase efforts to develop more integrated, intersectoral programmes, with the participation of the education, health and nutrition sectors.

14. Other important and related goals will be to reduce repetition rates in the first two grades of primary school and to improve the quality and efficiency of primary schools. Some countries of the region have already taken action to implement those goals by requesting UNICEF support in such areas in their country programme submissions to the 1991 session of the UNICEF Executive Board.

C. Children in especially difficult circumstances

15. All countries of the region are conducting situation analyses to ascertain the number and the problems of children in especially difficult circumstances, as well as the number of those at risk, using a methodology created for the region. The research will be used to promote national policies, to mobilize both national and external resources and to increase public awareness of the problem and commitment to solve it. This focus on research and policy formulation reinforces the open and human approach that 16 countries in the region have successfully implemented in dealing with the problems of children in especially difficult circumstances. Because effective programmes for assisting working and street children have already been initiated in most countries of the region, future actions will target those children not yet covered by existing programmes.

D. Women in development

16. According to ECLAC estimates, 140 million women live in poverty in the region. An important activity in 14 countries of the region in the past year, therefore, has been to call the attention of the public and policy makers to the situation of women through research studies describing their problems and through programme activities to help to generate income and improve their health and educational status. Four successful models for women's development have been identified in Brazil, Chile, Ecuador and Mexico. These case studies will be documented to help to stimulate their replication in other countries of the region.

17. To coordinate women's development activities at the country level, some Governments have established advisory groups, and five have created women's bureaux. UNICEF has been advised that nine more Governments expect to open similar bureaux. An attempt will be made to create a network of women's offices to coordinate the efforts of the Governments of the region and to facilitate the exchange of experiences among them. Special collaboration will

be established with subregional parliamentarian groups, as well as with other United Nations organizations such as ECLAC, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

E. The Catholic Church

18. Cooperation has been established with the Catholic Church in Argentina, the Dominican Republic and Peru. An agreement was also signed between Catholic Relief Services, the Latin American Bishops' Council and UNICEF to initiate a regional research project on child-rearing practices and patterns, with financial support from the World Bank's Special Adjustment Facility for Latin American and the Caribbean (SAFLAC). The results of this study will be discussed in the General Assembly of Latin American Bishops to be held in 1992.

F. External relations

19. External relations activities in the region have been largely confined to promoting both public and governmental awareness of the World Conference on Education for All, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the World Summit for Children. A special advocacy effort was made among presidential candidates in seven countries to promote the Convention on the Rights of the Child and child development.

G. Management

20. In compliance with an Executive Board recommendation, the Americas and the Caribbean Regional Office and the office for Bogota and Venezuela were separated during 1990, and a representative for Colombia and Venezuela has been appointed. It has also been proposed in the biennial budget for 1992-1993 that the Executive Board create sub-offices in Argentina and Venezuela and upgrade the Nicaragua office to the level of country office.